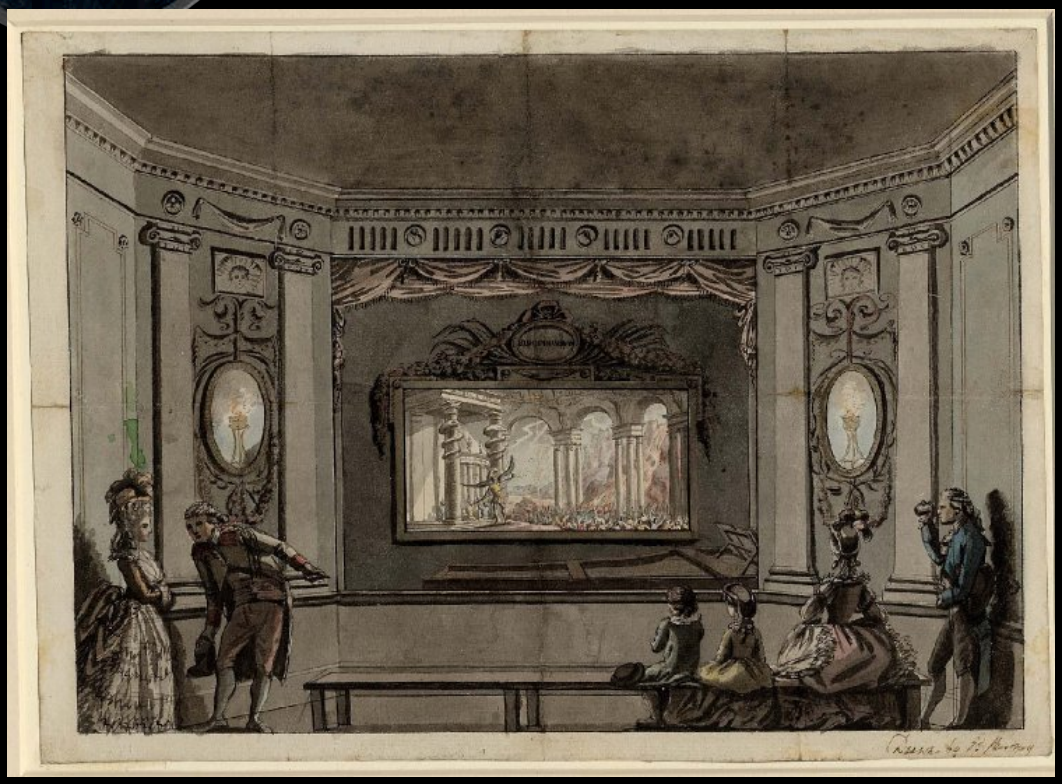
WCIAL Quarterly #3

In This Issue:
Paradise Lost and the world's first movie cinema!



Above: Depiction of Philippe Jacques de Loutherbourg's cinema

"Give me the liberty to know, to utter, and to argue freely according to conscience, above all liberties." - John Milton, America's Poet

That Standard Bearer of our Liberty, John Milton

Milton is the philosopher poet of Truth and Freedom. We know that both issues are highly relevant today as opposing sides in the world claim that they alone are right and the opposing side wrong. Both extremes seem to want to suppress the thoughts and expression of those with whom they disagree. Righteousness on both sides is rampant. But as Milton said:

"Let her [Truth] and Falsehood grapple; who ever knew Truth put to the worse in a free and open encounter? Her confuting is the best and surest suppressing."
— John Milton, Areopagitica

"They are the troublers, they are the dividers of unity, who neglect and don't permit others to unite those dissevered pieces which are yet wanting to the body of Truth."
— John Milton, Areopagitica

Copyright Yuko Nii Foundation 2016

PARADISE LOST AND THE FIRST MOVIE CINEMA

THE ROMANTICS

Romanticism was characterized by its emphasis on emotion and individualism as well as glorification of all the past, nature and especially the exotic, as seen in ***Kubla Khan***, the poem by Samuel Taylor Coleridge.

The movement emphasized intense emotion for aesthetic experience, emphasizing emotions such as apprehension, horror and terror, and awe—especially that experienced in confronting the new aesthetic categories of the sublimity and beauty of nature. It also valued spontaneity, and sensual experiences of the flesh.

For the Romantics, the Devil held no more terror. Thus the Romantics could play with ideas associated with him and delight in excesses of sex, alcohol and, even in Thomas de Quincey's case, drugs such as opium were seen as conducive to artistic and literary imagination.

According to Coleridge's Preface to "Kubla Khan", the poem was composed one night after he experienced an opium-influenced dream after reading a work describing Xanadu, the summer palace of the Mongol ruler and Emperor of China Kublai Khan.

> In Xanadu did Kubla Khan
> A stately pleasure-dome decree :
> Where Alph, the sacred river, ran
> Through caverns measureless to man
> Down to a sunless sea. (lines 1–5)

Thus characterized the 18th century rife with high imagination, sensuality and no fear of the devil!

FROM Jrank:

Hedonism is a modern word derived from the Greek *hedone*, or "pleasure." As a philosophical position, moral hedonism justifies pleasure as a good, or even the good. Its history can be traced back to Hellenistic philosophy.

Ancient ethics can be defined as a response to the question: "What is a good life?" The first reply to such a question is "happiness" (*eudaimonia*). This starting point is common to Plato (c. 428–348 or 347 B.C.E.) and Aristotle (384–322 B.C.E.), to Epicureanism and Stoicism, but then the competition about the proper definition of "happiness" begins. What is happiness? And here, with the variety of meanings of *eudaimonia*, the discrepancy among philosophical traditions unfolds. Yet, at the point where the disagreement begins, we find a remarkable consensus about what usually comes to mind as the most obvious candidate. It is pleasure.

Generally hedonism is rejected by Christian doctrine. And fear of Satan's influence in using the attractiveness of pleasure to achieve sin and corruption was a grave concern for theologians through the early 18th century and continues even to this day in most Christian communities. However, the enlightenment changed all of this in philosophical circles with the thinking of John Locke, Descarte and others.

Talk of the Devil: Crime and Satanic Inspiration in Eighteenth-Century England by Owen Davies on Academia:

The late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries are usually seen as a defining era in Western Christianity, a period when Satan was largely stripped of his power. The omnipotent Devil, central to the millenarian preoccupations of the early modern period, recruiter of a legion of witches to overthrow Christianity, was disenchanted.

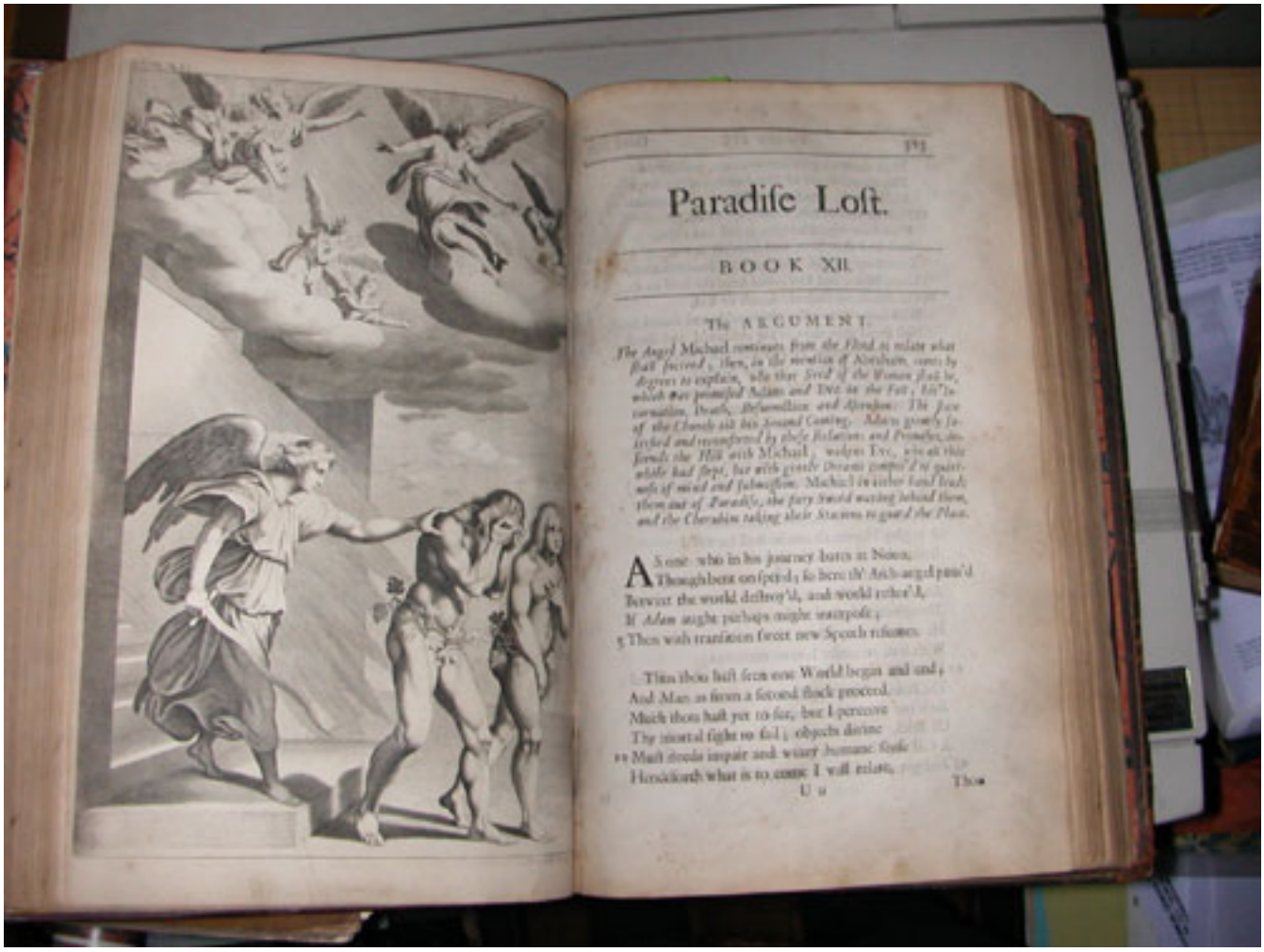
His enfeeblement and relegation to Hell was bound up with the wider debate about divine intercession. The decline of Satan's earthly influence was just one symptom of God's partial withdrawal from human affairs, along with the end of the age of miracles, and a reduction in providential occurrences and angelic appearances.

It was also still a lively matter of public debate in urban artisan and middling society at the end of the century, as is evident from several public debates on the question: 'Is there any real foundation for a belief in the Devil?'

Yet, apart from the continued historiographical interest in some Nonconformists' adherence to diabolic intervention, the history of the Devil after the early eighteenth century shifts decidedly from the social to the literary context, from the study of the Devil as fearful reality to his symbolic artistic representation.

According to Dr. Robert J. Wickenheiser, one of the greatest scholars and collectors of John Milton, "…poets who aspire to lofty goals lend themselves most readily to being illustrated, providing us with the opportunity of looking at how a poem or group of poems is seen in the eye of an artist. Instead of learning about the themes and poetry of a given age or period as seen only through the eyes of writers and critics, we are privileged to have the views of the artist to help us see and appreciate the poetic vision of the poet, sometimes in great variation from one period to the next or as viewed by one generation to the next."

In the case of John Milton he has been inspirational to artists beyond all others and is one of the most illustrated authors of all time. The 1688 edition of his Paradise Lost was, according to Edward Hodnett, "the first serious effort to illustrate an important work of English poetry."



Recently many efforts are made to digitalize Milton and bring his work and his illustrators to the general online community. Professor Hugh Macrae Richmond of Berkley University has especially been active on his Website 'Milton Revealed," and The Mellon Foundation gave his program a 2 million dollar grant.

Recently a digital online interactive virtual reality board game was created by Terrance Lindall. Thus Milton has expanded as far as technology can take it…thus far.

You can play it here: https://tabletopia.com/games/paradiselost

Most amazingly is that the VERY FIRST movie cinema in the world was of Milton's PARADISE LOST in an enlightened atmosphere of hedonism and no fear of the devil. The year was 1782.

The Romantic Revolution:
John Milton's Paradise Lost
And
The First Movie Cinema

In 1781, artist Philippe Jacques de Loutherbourg was hired by a wealthy young aesthete, William Beckford, to prepare a private birthday spectacle at his mansion. De Loutherbourg, was inventor of a "moving picture" entertainment, the Eidophusikon, "a mysterious something that the eye has not seen nor the heart conceived." Beckford wanted an Oriental spectacle to seduce a thirteen year old boy, William Courtenay, and Louisa Beckford, his own cousin's wife.

Philippe de Loutherbourg 's movie was a miniature mechanical theatre measuring six by eight feet, and described as displaying "Various Imitations of Natural Phenomena, represented by Moving Pictures". He used Argand lamps to light the stage and stained glass to change colours.

Above: William Courtney age 13, "the prettiest boy of his time"

THE ORGY AT CHRISTMAS

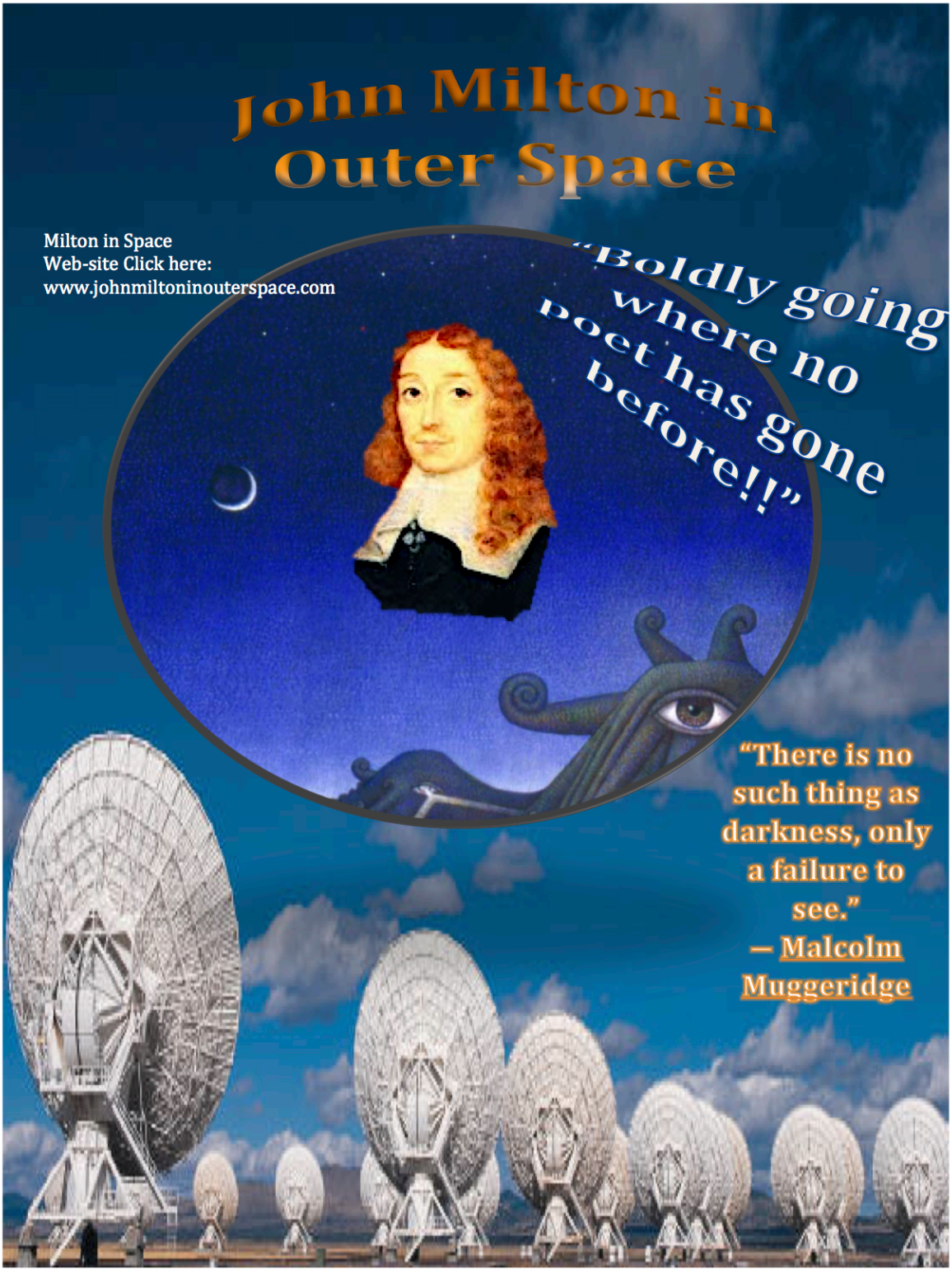
The three day party and spectacle staged over Christmas became one of the scandals of the day with accusations of sodomy. However, this Oriental spectacle was the predecessor to modern-day cinema. Thus proceeded "… their three nights of delirium, dwelling steamily on orgiastic 'iniquities' and 'sacrifices,' on 'young victims panting on the altar,' and on spectre raisings and demonic rituals."

Loutherbourg anticipated the famous nineteenth-century "Phantasmagoria" of French showman, Gaspard Robertson, by producing in 1782 a miniature Gothic movie scene based on the Pandemonium episode in **Milton's Paradise Lost**.

W.H. Pyne described the scene:
"Here, in the foreground of a vista, stretching an immeasurable length between mountains, ignited from their bases to their lofty summits, with many coloured flame a chaotic mass rose in dark majesty, which gradually assumed form until it stood, the interior of a vast temple, bright as molten brass, seemingly composed of unconsuming and unquenchable fire."
Hardcastle 302-3

"As a swarm of intricately-built mechanical demons clambered out of the asphaltic lake, concealed lights gradually transformed its waters from "sulphurous blue," to "lurid" red and then again to a "pale vivid light," an echo perhaps of the colour stages of an alchemical transmutation. For this new show Loutherbourg had also developed what Pyne called a "picturesque of sound." Intricate machinery produced "peals of thunder," the crackle of lightning and "groans, that struck the imagination as issuing from infernal spirits" (Hardcastle 302-03).

AN ALLEGORY ON THE 21 Century HUMAN CONDITION



www.miltoninouterspace.com

Milton's COMUS! Hedonism, Seduction, A Grand Spectacle of Art, Music and Performance! 2024
Info: tlindall@gmail.com

THE WAH CENTER PRESENTS

COMUS, A GRAND masquerade ball!